

The Failure of Many to Enter In

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Matthew 7:21-23

Did you know that not everyone that calls Jesus Lord is going to heaven?

This is what Jesus made clear here in His great Sermon on the Mount. He spoke of those who said to Him, "Lord, Lord." He made mention of those that even prophesied in His name, cast out devils in His name, and did many mighty works in His name. Many

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of them will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will be told to depart.

Rather startling, isn't it?

Who, then, will enter into the kingdom? Those who do the will of the Father in heaven.

From this we may conclude that calling Jesus Lord and doing many mighty works in His name are not necessarily doing the will of God. And by all means it is necessary to do the will of the Father in heaven!



Jesus spoke here of those who seemingly serve Him and His kingdom.

He spoke, first, of those who said to Him, "Lord, Lord." A controversial question during Jesus' ministry was whether He was the promised Christ. If He is the Christ, He must be acknowledged as Lord. Those who said to Him, "Lord, Lord," were acknowledging Him as such and indicating that they were ready to submit to His lordship.

Jesus spoke here also of those whose conduct seemed to support their profession. Often in the church you find members who make a good profession but who do not live in harmony with it. This proves their profession to be false. Not so here. Jesus spoke of those who prophesied in His name. That means that they brought Jesus' teachings to others, with the express desire to promote His Lordship. In addition, they cast out devils in His name. In Jesus' day, miracles verified the truth of one's prophecy. And they did many other mighty works, all, it would appear, to promote the cause and kingdom of Jesus Christ.

But one thing they were not doing. They were not doing the will of the Father in heaven.

This is rather striking. Calling Jesus Lord and doing mighty works in His name certainly appears to be the will of the Father. But according to Jesus this is not enough. Some may do these things and still not be doing the will of God.

We must understand this in

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light of the general error of the Scribes and Pharisees that influenced not only many in Jesus' day but also today.

The Scribes and Pharisees did not acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Nor did they work for His cause and kingdom. They were the avowed enemies of Jesus. Yet they did perform many "mighty works." They were the religious leaders in Israel who both proclaimed the law of God and religiously kept the law. They were considered by all Israel to be the builders of God's church and kingdom.

Yet they were not doing the will of the Father. This was because their obedience to God's law was only external, a matter of their outward behavior. They missed the very heart and essence of the law, which is love. The first and great commandment of the law is to love God. The second is like unto it, to love your neighbor as yourself. But the Scribes and Pharisees were not motivated by love. All their fine, impeccable compliance to the law was rooted in self-promotion, especially a desire to gain the praise of men. Jesus, who knew their hearts, exposed this repeatedly, even showing how their evil hearts led them to use the letter of the law to take unfair advantage of the poor. They were hypocrites, whom Jesus compared to sepulchers that were painted white on the outside but within were filled with dead men's bones. Jesus indicated that to enter into the kingdom, one's righteousness (obedience) must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20).

Now Jesus applied this same principle to those who followed Him. They called Him Lord. Some even did many mighty works in His name. But a goodly number of them were not doing the will of the Father. When their works were analyzed according to the great commandments of the law, they were only workers of iniquity. One obvious example was Judas

Iscariot. He called Jesus Lord. With the twelve he prophesied in Jesus' name, cast out devils in Jesus' name, and did many mighty works that advanced the cause and kingdom of Jesus. Yet it was all for self-promotion. He was not doing the will of the Father. And there were many others among Jesus' followers who were essentially the same as Judas. They saw Jesus as a political savior who would bring riches, power, and honor once more to the Jewish people. And when it became apparent that Jesus' kingdom was heavenly and not earthly, they crucified Him.

There are many in the church today who are no different.

This does not apply to those whose lives are not perfect, who strive in the power of the cross to love God and their neighbor, but find that daily they fall short and need to go to the cross to find forgiveness. Because the works of grace are not finished, this is the experience of every true child of the Father.

But this does apply to those in the church who seemingly make a good confession and live

outwardly good lives, but do so only to promote themselves. A good outward confession gives them access to a certain group of friends. A moral life promotes business. Prophesying in Jesus' name brings praise and honor, perhaps even power. And then there are those who have been deceived by the false gospel of our day that to confess Jesus as Lord will bring the blessing of God in the form of successful careers and earthly prosperity.



Jesus will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

There is coming a day, a deci-

sive day, in which some will be brought into the kingdom and others will be excluded. This is the day of final judgment, when all will be judged according to their works.

In that day those who have called Jesus Lord without doing the will of the Father will fall short of the kingdom. It will be revealed that for all their mighty works and wonderful confessions, they did not do the will of the Father. They were, in fact, nothing but workers of iniquity. When Jesus bars them from the kingdom, they will object. Have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And Jesus will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

I never knew you!

There are those whom Jesus knows.

This is a knowledge that Jesus has from eternity. God has eternally determined to save to Himself a people. These God has given to Jesus Christ to be His and to save. From all eternity Christ knows them. This knowledge is not a knowledge merely of who they are. It is an intimate knowledge of love.

Those whom Jesus knew from eternity He also knew at the cross. At the cross Jesus gave His life to pay for the sins of all those whom the Father gave Him. This payment was essential. It alone gives the elect of God the right to the kingdom. As He gave His life's blood at the cross, He knew this people. He had each one in His heart. This alone enabled Him to endure the shame of the cross.

Those whom Jesus knew eternally and at the cross, Jesus also knows during their lifetime on earth. In that knowledge of love He applies to them the blessings of the cross. This results in an

Doing the will of the Father is beyond our ability. It is possible only by the transforming work of Jesus Christ.

amazing transformation of their lives, so that they begin to do the will of the Father in every part of their life. This work of God is what makes them spiritually fit for the kingdom.

And so Jesus also knows them in the day of judgment. He recognizes them as His own. He sees His work of grace in them and adores what they are. And He publicly acknowledges them to be His own.

What a horrible thing, then, to stand in that day and hear from Jesus, I never knew you! This would be a public declaration that He did not know you from eternity. You were not given to Him of the Father. He did not know you at the cross. He did not give His life as a payment for your sin. He did not know you during your life on earth. He never transformed you to make you fit for the kingdom. And so He does not

know you now, as you stand in the final judgment.

Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity!

God forbid!



What will be revealed about you in that day?

Will it be revealed that you called Jesus Lord? Went to church regularly? Gave your children a covenant education? Busied yourself with kingdom causes? Read your Bible? Defended the truth?

It is important that all these things are revealed about you.


But that is not enough.

It is also important that, in all these things, you did the will of the Father. This does not mean that you have done great and mighty works that have added thousands to the church. But it does mean that you loved God from the bottom of your heart and that you loved your neighbor as yourself. It

does mean that in love you sought the honor of God and the welfare of your neighbor. And it means that in your confession and life you sought to accomplish that purpose of love.

Then the Lord will profess to you, You I know. Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

To seek the honor of God and the welfare of our neighbor requires that we live daily by faith in Jesus Christ. Doing the will of the Father is beyond our ability. It is possible only by the transforming work of Jesus Christ. Let us then by faith in Jesus Christ do the will of the Father. When we fail, let us repent and find forgiveness in the cross.

And in that day, when the Lord shall come to judge the living and the dead, we will find our place in the kingdom. 

Marriage and the Culture of Divorce (1)

There was a time when in any conference on marriage the primary interest would have been the question of divorce and remarriage and the growing prevalence of such occurrences in the church.

(What is printed here is the basic text of a speech given at a conference on marriage sponsored by the evangelism committee of Southwest PRC. It is offered here as an editorial in the interest of reaching a larger audience on a topic of growing discussion, concern, and importance.)

Not at present, however.

Overshadowing everything at present is the gay-liberation movement and the move to legalize homosexual union. Something so basic and obvious as marriage being defined as the union between a man and a woman is being challenged. Why not a man with a man?

Compared to the enormity of what is at stake in legalizing homosexual union, the question over what constitutes biblical divorce and the right of the divorced to remarry seems but a secondary issue.

We can understand why. The vigor of the homosexual assault on the laws of marriage requires a strong and focused attention at the moment and a sharp biblical response. Be that as it may, let us be warned, the present preoccupation with the assault of homosexuality on marriage brings its own danger, namely, that Christians begin to think, "Well, at least this or that church still refuses to pronounce God's blessing on gay unions. Her clergy will give their blessing only to unions between male and female. This proves that at least she

is still faithful to God's Word when it comes to marriage."

This must not happen. It is not enough that a church stand opposed to the union of homosexuals. A church's stand and practice on divorce and then the remarriage of the divorced church members is not of secondary importance.

It is precisely the commonness of divorce between heterosexuals in our day, taking place with Christianity's approval no less, that has undermined the sanctity of marriage itself. It is divorce between male and female that has led to the justification of homosexual unions, and has effectively destroyed arguments against legalizing such unions.

It is divorce between male and female that has led to the justification of homosexual unions, and has effectively destroyed arguments against legalizing such unions.

This was brought home by a statement made by mayor Richard Daley of Chicago. The mayor has gone on record stating that he would have no problem issuing licenses permitting marriages between homosexuals. He was responding to the argument of concerned citizens that the issuance of marriage licenses to same-sex couples would undermine marriage. The mayor's irritated reply? "Marriage has been [already] undermined by divorce, so don't tell me about [undermining] marriage!" (*World* magazine, Feb. 28, 2004).

The weight of this argument is substantial.

You say you are against homosexual unions in order to save marriage? Save it from what? The advocates of homosexual unions point out, "You as Christians and we as society have already savaged marriage by permitting it to be ripped apart by allowing for divorce upon demand. What exactly are you trying to save!

"You argue that to allow homosexual marriage will loose a

host of various evils upon society, beginning with the destruction of the family unit and its scars upon the children? And which of these so-called devastating evils has not already been loosed by the misery of divorce?

"So what is your argument? That only heterosexuals, by the flood of breakups of their marriages, should be free to loose these evils upon society, not homos?

This should be a right reserved to you? Give us a break!"

The point is, a society that has sown the wind (by insisting on divorce upon demand) now reaps the whirlwind of adopting laws that will basically destroy the institution

of marriage altogether.

And what must be understood is that the Christian church, having shaken loose from the biblical moorings of divorce and remarriage, is being driven by the same wind, has compromised her witness against the present evil, and is, in fact, largely guilty of contributing to the present grievous state of affairs.

How can the church, whose divorce and remarriage rate in study after study has proved to be virtually the same as that of society claim any differently?

This is the great ecclesiastical scandal of our day — the degree to which the church has capitulated to society's pressures and practices; the degree to which the church has allowed her members' marriages to reflect the same lack of commitment as those of society at large.

In light of the above, churches must understand the importance of returning to a biblical stand on divorce and remarriage and then being resolved to live by it. Only in this way will the marriage situation within the church be significantly different from society at

large; only in this way will the church regain the power of her witness against what is happening to marriage out there in the world.

The question arises, what are the things that have given rise to the alarming rate of divorce in our day and age, seemingly making divorce almost as common as the marriage that preceded it? (In reality, about 1/2 of all marriages end in divorce, and about 1/3 of all first-time marriages.)

But more to the point, what are the factors that have made divorce amongst professing Christians as common as divorce between out-and-out unbelievers? This is the truly alarming, and even scandalous, thing.

When it comes to society at large and the exploding divorce rate, I am convinced that there are at least three main contributing factors.

First, the recent adoption across the nation of no-fault divorce laws

No-fault divorce laws have made it rather easy to obtain a state-approved divorce. No-fault divorce is really a rather recent phenomenon. I say "recent" because such laws came into existence only a little over 30 years ago. In 1970 none other than Gov. Ronald Reagan of California signed the first no-fault divorce legislation into law. The rest of the states followed suit in short order.

Prior to 1970 one could not obtain a divorce unless one of the spouses could prove that the other had committed some grievous breach of the marital vows. If you could not prove such a breach, you were stuck with that spouse. As well, according to *World* magazine, "In general, the laws punish[ed] the errant spouse economically, while trying to lessen the hardships the wronged spouse [would] face" (May 20, 2000, p. 13). The burden of proof required for a divorce, together with the economic sanctions, acted as a deterrent of course. This

all changed with the no-fault divorce laws of the 1970s. Now all that is required is the stated desire to end the relationship. "I do not like the bum. Do not ask me why. Someone else will make me happier. That's all you need to know." And that was grounds enough to terminate the marriage, according to the State.

What we must understand is that "no-fault divorce laws" did not just fall out of the sky. No-fault divorce laws came about because of the hardness of the citizens' hearts. They were enacted to satisfy a society that would be satisfied with nothing less than divorce upon demand. It is no coincidence that Governor Reagan of Hollywood vintage was himself divorced and remarried.

Since WW II, however, there have been especially two other factors that have fueled this divorce mentality; first, the presence of more and more women in the workforce — in particular, wives and mothers: and second, the advent of television, the new altar about which family life more and more revolved and revolves.

The increased number of women in the workforce

Working outside the home gave women a greater economic independence. And with greater economic self reliance came a greater independent spirit in every aspect of life. As a result, fierce marital wars, with neither party willing to yield, became commonplace.

But as well, in the second place, wives in the workforce have fed the fuel of divorce due to the influence of coworkers. Women unhappy with their marriages come home having been encouraged to stand up for their rights and give ultimatums. Coworkers (themselves on their own third or fourth marriage) declare, "You do not have to put up with that! Divorce the bum! I did. And I have never been happier!"

The office and the workplace

have become breeding places for divorce by encouraging confrontation and an unwillingness to put up with any unhappiness with one's spouse. It ties in with the women's lib movement, of course.

But even more, women in the workplace has led to the temptation of adultery, or as they say, "having an affair." Men working side by side with other men's wives leads to all kinds of temptations. The outcome is devastating to marriage.

This was well documented by *Newsweek* magazine (July 12, 2004), whose cover story was labeled "The New Infidelity," with the subtitle "From Office Affairs to Internet Hookups, More Wives Are Cheating Too." Adultery occasioned by the workplace, where men and other men's wives have regular contact, has become commonplace. The upsurge of divorce comes as no surprise.

Television, with its insidious and all pervasive influence

We are told that by 1960 nine out of every ten households had a television (*World* magazine, *op. cit.*). Today it is more than 99 out of 100 households (with most having more than one TV). This means that the last couple of generations of married people have been raised with Hollywood setting the pattern, both through its fornicating, big-mouth, divorce-prone celebrities, and by its productions majoring in infidelity and free, no-strings-attached sex.

When a generation and its children (Christian households not excluded, sad to say) have been entertained hour after hour by such immorality and assaults on purity of life and behavior, should we be

surprised by the results? What else can we expect but sexual impurity, and a despising of marriage and its roles and responsibilities!

Add to that what computers and the Internet now add to the brew, and it is not difficult to see that everything today conspires against purity and faithfulness in marriage.

Divorce has become the name of the game. And so the marriage mess we have today.

But the greatest grief is the extent to which this divorce mentality has infected the church herself. Study after study has revealed that divorce has become as common in the church as in society at large.

Why?

In large part because the factors we have listed above have become as commonplace in the lives and homes of professing Christians as they have in ungodly society at large. In too many homes one has to shout above the televisions and whatnot to be heard.

How this has come to be is not difficult to determine. The greatest guilt lies at the doorstep of the church herself. The modern-day church has failed in a twofold way.

#1 — The Christian church has refused to preach and teach what we call the antithesis — the call to a distinctively different and separated life, insisting on its evidence in her members.

#2 — The church has simply chosen not to teach her members Christ's clear word on the matter of marriage and divorce.

About this first failure, the refusal in the preaching to emphasize the antithetical lifestyle, we will be brief (though this is not to under-

estimate the significance of this factor).

That pulpits that preach the an-

...the last couple of generations of married people have been raised with Hollywood setting the pattern, both through its fornicating, big-mouth, divorce-prone celebrities, and by its productions majoring in infidelity and free, no-strings-attached sex.

tithetical lifestyle (“Be ye separate from the world”) are few and far between is evident. Consider that most members of Protestant churches today (professing Christians with their families) are as ready to consider Hollywood with its productions to be a legitimate form of entertainment as are the out-and-out ungodly. They have been taught no differently. Where from the modern-day pulpit is there reproof and prohibition concerning this evil today?

Good night! Today, preachers

make reference to movies to underscore their gospel message because they know everyone is far more familiar with the latest Hollywood offering than the gospel stories themselves!

To be sure, everyone is death on smoking these days, pulpits especially. A willingness to address and hammer directly on the conscience there! Where is there anything resembling the same zeal and thunder against Hollywood’s godless entertainment with its godless propaganda across the board?

Christians insist that the garbage of Hollywood is their Christian liberty (one of their inalienable rights), and pulpits have not the courage to disagree, condemn, or even timidly warn. And the church wonders why the marriages of her Brad Pitt etc. fans (yes, I read *Time* magazine too) are coming apart at the seams?

For our children’s sakes, and their future marriages, and for the love of God, it is time we all take stock.

...to be continued. 

Letters

■ Conversions under impure preaching?

In the November 15, 2004 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, the article “The Role of Every Believer in Evangelism,” written by Rev. Jason Kortering, contained a disturbing quote. It was the quote from John Sittema. “People get saved in Baptist or other fundamentalistic churches and then they learn good theology and become Calvinists.” Sittema stated that this “correlative attitude” is “acceptable” and “popular” among Calvinists.

So, someone can be “saved,” and still subscribe to “bad” theology! “Bad” or “false” theology is a false view of God, whether from ignorance or heresy. What is being stated here is that one can worship an idol and still be “saved.” If the churches maintain this, how can they condemn other heresies? The fundamentalists are just as guilty of making a “god” of their own design as anyone else! Another problem with this view is that many people gave their lives for “good” theology. If you can be “saved” without “good” theology, is it that important? The answer would be no.

Michael Fultz
Clarkston, MI

RESPONSE:

Even though the quotation of John Sittema was inserted in my article for a different purpose, that is, to illustrate a lack of zeal for mission outreach, the points that Brother Fultz raises can be drawn from the quotation and ought to be addressed.

I delineate three problems that the brother raises against the quotation and will address each one separately.

1. The theology of Baptist and Fundamentalist Churches is Arminian, it holds a false view of God, it is bad theology, it is idolatry. How can someone be saved through the ministry of such churches?

2. If we hold to the idea that people can be saved by such bad theology, how can we expose or condemn any heresy?

3. Finally, to allow such tolerance of Arminianism opposes the work of God in the history of the Reformed churches and implies that faithful saints of the past defended the Reformed faith in vain.

I want to begin with the last point, viz., what is a proper response to God’s work done by our forefathers in their opposing Arminianism? Correctly, they viewed Arminianism as it was introduced in the Reformed churches

of the Netherlands as a heresy that had to be exposed and rejected. The difficult struggle in the churches that led to the Synod of Dordt in 1618-19 demonstrates commitment to the truth of what has come to be known as Calvinism, or the doctrines of grace. I take my own signing of the Formula of Subscription seriously. It requires all Protestant Reformed office-bearers to express active assent to the contents of the Three Forms of Unity and a willingness to defend such truth and expose all errors that contradict them. Personally, I view the exposure of the error of Arminianism by the church in the past as a great gift of the Holy Spirit by which He also gave us the glorious truth of His sovereignty in salvation. This truth is vital to the well-being of the church today.

The first objection is the crucial one. How can one say what I do in the above paragraph and still say that God can save a soul by means of preaching that is tainted by the Arminianism of fundamentalist churches?

The answer lies in what we view as fundamental, that is, what components of the gospel as it is preached to unbelievers or non-Christians are necessary in order for them to be saved? Notice, I am not asking what fundamentals are

necessary for a Reformed pastor or missionary to include in his message when he addresses the gospel to non-Christians. Our commitment is to the whole counsel of God, which is given on the pages of Holy Writ and which we hold to be the Reformed faith. Rather, when we assess the way in which the Arminian preacher presents the gospel, do we see there sufficient content to be used by the Holy Spirit to work salvation?

I am not speaking of all Arminian preachers. There is such a variety today, and there are so many distortions, that it can certainly be said that not every Arminian preacher is used by God. The

question is, rather: Must we discredit all Arminian preachers, declaring them to be false prophets and beyond being used by God for salvation because of their Arminian theology? My answer is that in some instances the truth that they do proclaim may be used by the Holy Spirit to work salvation.

When a preacher or missionary holds to the fundamentals of Scripture, God uses him. These include the authority of Scripture; the fall of man into sin and his need for salvation; Jesus as the only Savior, who is qualified to make atonement for sin on the cross of Calvary because He is both God and man; the need for repentance and faith as the only way by which the benefits of Christ's death can be received by the sinner; and holy living as the proper response of forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God. These are the fundamentals that make up the message of such a pastor, and he comes with God's Word and quotes passages from it to support them.

The Arminian pastor or missionary adds many distortions to the above. He talks about a general love of God for all men, about the Savior's blood shed for every-

one, about the need for man to accept Jesus as Savior, with the emphasis upon man's free will. If you observe carefully, however, these additions address the scope of salvation and the power by which one is saved, but not the need or way of salvation itself. When a non-Christian comes under the gospel, foremost on his mind is not the question of scope or power but of fact and way. He must come to know the God of Scripture, his own sin before that God, the way of salvation in Jesus, the need for repentance and faith. How many are saved, and by what power they are saved, usually are questions he addresses as he ma-

tures in his faith. This explains why many who are converted through the preaching of Arminian pastors or missionaries ask hard questions as they read their Bibles and learn more of what the Bible says.

Many who come to love the Reformed faith and who get their theology straightened out view their own growth in faith as a spiritual pilgrimage. They were saved by means of a simple childlike faith, and as they grew in understanding the Bible, they realized that God was sovereign in their own salvation. Their eyes were opened when they came to learn that God loved them from eternity; that Christ shed His blood for them as a very special act, which was limited by God's own good pleasure; and that when they came to faith it was not of their own doing, but a wonderful drawing of the Father. Many Christians who experience such spiritual growth testify of this.

Here we must say something about such converts. Some of them may very well stay within the confines of an Arminian church and continue to possess such childlike, simple faith. They may not even be in an environment in which any-

one challenges them to think of God and His sovereignty. They may see no conflict at all between their supposed free will and salvation as God's gift. I have had the opportunity to ask them, "Are you saved because of what you have done for your salvation or because of what God has done for you?" I have yet to meet one who does not insist on the latter. It isn't true that everyone who professes Arminianism is a hard-core opponent of the Reformed faith. Rather than judge their spiritual state, we ought to be charitable and leave them to God who judges hearts.

It is a different matter with Arminians who have been exposed to the truth of God's sovereignty and then oppose that truth as it applies to the salvation of sinners, as that is so beautifully expressed in Scripture and the Reformed confessions. Some of these men have become bitter enemies of the Reformed faith. The Conclusion of the Canons of Dordt addresses a warning to such men. "Moreover, the Synod warns calumniators themselves to consider the terrible judgment of God which awaits them for bearing false witness against the confessions of so many churches, for distressing the consciences of the weak, and for laboring to render suspected the society of the truly faithful." In our day as well, many pastors, professors, and leaders in Arminian churches who adamantly reject the truth of God's sovereignty in salvation have greater accountability before God for defending such heresy and lies.

One lesson we ought to learn is that all heresy is not alike, and all who hold to heresy are not alike. This will warn us not to judge others rashly. We have to ask ourselves, does an error actually threaten a person's salvation, or might it lead to a person's denial of the faith? Some errors that are willfully confessed by men contradict the faith in such a way that a person cannot hold them and be a

When a non-Christian comes under the gospel, foremost on his mind is not the question of scope or power but of fact and way.

true believer. A denial of the divinity of Christ is such an error. An insistence that man saves himself, without the prior working of divine grace, comes close to such error as well. Other people may hold to errors out of tradition: they were taught these things from their youth and they never questioned them. Such persons are more open to correction than those who have been challenged in their error and defend it.

Now, to say a few words about the second objection. I paraphrase it thus: If we allow the possibility of God's using Arminians to save souls, we will be soft on exposing error and upholding the truth, for the effect will be that we will expose no error.

It seems to me that the best way to address this objection is to refer to history. The Canons of Dordt did not employ the methodology of the Roman Catholics in their Council of Trent, when they heaped anathemas upon their adversaries. Rather, the Canons of Dordt set forth the truth of what we often call the Five Points of Calvinism in both a negative (rejection of errors) and positive manner. The Canons are pastoral throughout, cautioning the adherents of error, showing to them the consequences of such heresy, exalting the name of God for His faithfulness and sovereignty.

In the subsequent history of the Reformed churches, we do not find them consigning all their opponents to hell for their heresy. They did not concern themselves with such, for this is God's domain. They concerned themselves with the error, and with the impact it had on the cause of the gospel.

Our own history as churches testifies to the same. A couple of anecdotes will suffice. I recall well when, one time, Herman Hoeksema was preaching on infant baptism and showing the differences between infant and believers' baptism. Carefully he demonstrated the differences in the theology, es-


pecially as Arminian theology distorted the doctrine of the covenant. Towards the end of the sermon he said words to this effect: though now we have differences, when we get to heaven, we will all be Protestant Reformed. He did not mean that only Protestant Reformed (or Reformed) people will go to heaven. He meant that both the believing Baptist and the believing Reformed will arrive in heaven, but in the glorious presence of Christ and with the heavenly illumination that we will receive in such a perfected state, we will all agree that the Reformed faith is right.

When I was a student in seminary, Hoeksema was explaining certain aspects of the doctrine of the catholicity (or, as he called it then, the multi-formity) of the church. To the right, on the chalkboard, he wrote PRC, and on the left he wrote Roman Catholic. Between these two extremes he inserted other Reformed and Presbyterian churches. He inserted also Baptist and Lutheran churches. Terms he used to describe his illustration were "degrees of apostasy" and "manifestations of the truth." He loved to speak of the PRC as a church that possessed the "purest manifestation of the truth."

A recent quotation from Rev. Herman Hoeksema, which Rev. Woudenberg furnished to a pastors' newsgroup on the Internet, demonstrates the same charitable attitude. It is a quotation taken from the *Banner*, January 2, 1919. "You know, a Calvinist (excuse the term; I am not any too fond of it myself. Never do I use it if I can help it. I don't think I have used it a half dozen times from the pulpit, which is not very frequent in three years and a half), I say a Calvinist is after all a distinctive Christian. Not all Christians are Calvinists. Mark, I say: 'not all Christians are Calvinists.' They may be Christians all right. Sure! Dear children of God, with whom I love to shake hands. I don't believe that there is a Calvinist that denies this. I don't think that there

is a Calvinist who maintains that the Calvinists are the only Christians. And those who love to waste paper (and that in this time when paper is so valuable!) by fighting against Calvinists who maintain that they are the only Christians on earth, are fighting a shadow, a product of their own imagination. No, but I claim that a Calvinist is a Christian of a distinctive type, with distinctive principles and views, in distinction, namely, from other Christians. Never let any method of reasoning lead you to the belief that all Christians are Calvinists, for then things will be getting so dark, that you lose all power to distinguish. The Methodist is a good sincere Christian, all right. Of course he is! A dear brother. But he is not a Calvinist. The same is true of the Anabaptist, the Lutheran, etc. All together they constitute the church of Jesus Christ on earth, as long as they confess that Jesus is the Christ. But within that large circle there are different shades and forms of faith, and the Calvinist also maintains his own distinctive world and life view in their midst. Now, what I mean to say is that to maintain your distinctive character as a Calvinistic Christian, you must not merely be able to discern clearly what distinguishes you from the rest, but you must have the courage of your conviction such as can be the fruit only of the faith in the Word of God. Only the conviction that our form of faith is the purest expression of Scripture (again, mark, I do not say: the only form or expression) can give us the courage to refuse amalgamation. And therefore, it is necessary, that we are conscious of the relation between our Reformed Faith and the Word of God."

I think the life of our founder demonstrated quite well that one doesn't have to believe that all Arminians are lost in order to be a good defender of the true gospel, the Reformed faith. We do well to carry on such faithfulness.

Rev. J. Kortering 

Reflections on That Peculiar Creature: the Editor of the *Standard Bearer* (1)

From the Reformed Free Publishing Association, publisher of the *Standard Bearer*, I received an invitation a few months ago to speak at the annual meeting of the association, “reflecting on your years as editor of the *Standard Bearer*.” My first inclination was to reject this topic because it requires me to talk about myself. This is a subject that is unappealing to me and that would be unedifying to you.

On second thought, however, I decided that the topic could very well serve to remind members of the RFPA and others who might be present tonight of the nature and purpose of the *Standard Bearer*. At the same time, the topic allows me to comment on certain features of my editorship and to inform you concerning some of the interesting correspondence I have received as editor over the past sixteen years. This, plainly, was the desire of the board of the RFPA.

I mentioned correspondence that I have received over the past sixteen years. I have received hundreds, perhaps thousands, of pieces of correspondence, to say nothing of telephone calls and personal visits in response to the editorials and the other articles that I wrote. Relatively few of the letters were published in the *Standard Bearer*. Many

were not suitable for publication. But virtually all of these pieces of correspondence I have dutifully answered. In preparation for this speech, I scanned the correspondence. I have chosen a few excerpts to illustrate what I have to say about the *Standard Bearer* and its editor.

My topic is “Reflections on that Peculiar Creature: the Editor of the *Standard Bearer*.” An editor of the *Standard Bearer* is a peculiar creature. He is a peculiar creature in his role as editor. In other respects, he may very well be pretty nearly a normal Christian human being. But as editor of the *Standard Bearer*, he is peculiar.

Early on in my editorship, a critic, a prominent Reformed minister in one of the Reformed denominations, was struck unfavorably by this peculiarity of the editor of the *Standard Bearer* and what seemed to him to be the difference between the editor of the *Standard Bearer* and the person who was editor of the *Standard Bearer*. In a harsh letter he wrote this to me, “I wish everyone could know you as I do — the family man, the friendly colleague, the able conversationalist. And I wish that the old man who writes these editorials (he was not talking about my age) would be put to death by the power of the Spirit. Your real day as a leader in the Reformed churches tarries until that old man dies.”

The peculiarity of the editor of the *Standard Bearer* is stamped upon him by the magazine itself. The *Standard Bearer*, now eighty years

old, has its own nature and purpose. It has its own distinctive personality, one might say. This personality of the *Standard Bearer* is peculiar among all the religious periodicals in the world. This personality of the *Standard Bearer* is a forceful one. No doubt the staff of the *Standard Bearer* appoint the editor in view of his being suited to do justice to the nature and purpose of the magazine. But the magazine itself makes the editor the peculiar creature he soon becomes.

The peculiarity of the editor of the *Standard Bearer* is due to the uniqueness of the *Standard Bearer*.

Nature and Purpose of the *SB*

The *Standard Bearer* has its own nature and purpose as determined by the origin of the magazine. The *Standard Bearer* first saw the light of day in October 1924 in connection with the controversy over common grace in the Christian Reformed Church. The first editor, Herman Hoeksema, and others, both ministers and laymen, founded the magazine to defend and develop the gospel of sovereign particular grace in close connection with the truth of the unconditional covenant of grace with the elect in Jesus Christ. From the very beginning the magazine fought for the truth against false teachings — especially the false teaching of common grace.

So forceful a personality was the *Standard Bearer* at its origin that there is a sense in which it is true that the *Standard Bearer* founded

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the Protestant Reformed Churches rather than that the Protestant Reformed Churches established the *Standard Bearer*. Herman Hoeksema and others created the *Standard Bearer* before there ever was a Protestant Reformed denomination. They founded the magazine when they were still members in fairly good standing in the Christian Reformed Church. Their writings in the *Standard Bearer* led directly to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1925 and 1926.

In addition, the three ministers involved in founding and writing in the *Standard Bearer* were deposed from office in the Christian Reformed Church in large part because they had established the *Standard Bearer* and because they had written in the *Standard Bearer* against the doctrine of common grace. In February of 1925 one of the founding editors, Henry Danhof, wrote an article entitled "Ha, Ha, Toch 'the *Standard Bearer*,' He!" That Dutch title, roughly translated, is something like this: "Oh, Oh, It Was Really the *Standard Bearer*, Then!" The thrust of that article was that it was the founding of the *Standard Bearer* that really provoked the wrath of the Christian Reformed Church so that they deposed these three ministers.

The nature and purpose of the *Standard Bearer* are stated in its constitutions. The constitution of the editorial staff of the *Standard Bearer* states as the purpose of the organization, "The maintenance, development, and propagation of our distinctively Protestant Reformed principles by means of the printed page." The constitution of the Reformed Free Publishing Association, publisher of the *Standard Bearer*, gives this as the purpose of the organization: "1. To witness to the truth contained in the Word of God and expressed in the Three Forms of Unity. 2. To

reveal false and deceptive views repugnant thereto." The very next article in the constitution of the RFPA adds that to "effectuate the purpose contained in Article 2, this association shall publish and distribute a magazine to be known as the *Standard Bearer*."

The nature and purpose of the *Standard Bearer*, determined by its origin and officially set down in its constitutions, have been confirmed by the *Standard Bearer's* long history and powerful tradition. The *Standard Bearer* is now, this very year, and within a few days of this very meeting, eighty years old. I am not yet entirely out of the position of being editor of the *Standard Bearer*. Legally I am editor until the last day of September. With the limited powers that remain to me as a lame duck editor, may I request that all of you join with me in making tonight the birthday celebration of the *Standard Bearer*. Let us agree that, among the other purposes of our coming together tonight, we are celebrating with gratitude to God the eightieth birthday of the *Standard Bearer*.

That is not an insignificant matter. In His providence, God has honored the *Standard Bearer* as being now the oldest continuously published subscription based Reformed magazine in North America. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say, the oldest Reformed magazine continuously published in North America. That is a blessing of God. God has also blessed the magazine in that for eighty years, to the present hour, the magazine has been true to its purpose. It has witnessed to the Reformed faith as expressed in the creeds and as distinctively maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches, while exposing false and deceptive doctrines repugnant thereto. This is the personality of the *Stan-*

God has also blessed the magazine in that for eighty years, to the present hour, the magazine has been true to its purpose.

dard Bearer, as even its critics recognize. And this personality it stamps on its editors. It makes them peculiar creatures.

A Theological Magazine

According to its nature and purpose, its personality, the *Standard Bearer* is a theological magazine. The content of the *Standard Bearer* is doctrinal. All the doctrines of the Reformed faith, as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity, are the content of the magazine. The *Standard Bearer* explains these doctrines, defends these doctrines, and develops these doctrines. An editor, and the writers in the magazine, must not overlook this aspect of the work of the *Standard Bearer*: It *develops* doctrine. It also applies these doctrines to the lives of the people of God.

The doctrines of the Reformed faith are a system, a harmonious body of interrelated truths. The grand truth that unifies all the doctrines is the godhead, goodness, and grace of the triune God in Jesus Christ. This grand truth of the godhead, goodness, and grace of Jehovah God in Jesus Christ is theology. Inasmuch as the content of the *Standard Bearer* in various ways treats of this truth of God, the *Standard Bearer* is theological.

The very first article of the very first issue of the *Standard Bearer* was a meditation by Herman Hoeksema entitled "Jehovah's Goodness." When I became editor in 1988, someone sent me a framed copy of this very first page of the *Standard Bearer*. This framed copy of the very first page of the *Standard Bearer* has hung over the desk where I did much of the work as editor, reminding me that the *Standard Bearer* is a theological magazine.

This is not to say that the magazine does not or should not contain articles on the Reformed life and experience — as we say, practical articles. Surely it does have such articles and ought to have such articles. To say nothing of the

other writers and rubrics, without which, I remind you, there can be no *Standard Bearer*, I recall off the top of my head editorials on pornography, marriage, Sabbath observance, catechism instruction, Christian schools, home schooling, and attending the movie “The Passion of the Christ.” As for articles on Reformed experience, I may point to my last, unfinished series on assurance of salvation, which is as experiential, I dare say, as any Puritan writer. But also these practical editorials are grounded in Reformed doctrine, that is, the truth about God. They apply that doctrine to the life and experience of believers and their children. They aim at the glory of God in the holy life of God’s covenant people.

The *Standard Bearer* is a theological magazine. This is its personality. It is not a religious news service with glossy pictures that entertain but do not instruct (although it contains a news column that is probably one of the most popular columns in the entire magazine). The *Standard Bearer* is not a family magazine with short, simple articles of human interest for everybody in the family, including a child’s page with some puzzles and some quizzes.

Neither is the *Standard Bearer* a missionary magazine. It certainly witnesses to many people outside the Protestant Reformed Churches.


Probably, eight or nine hundred subscription issues are mailed twice a month to people who are not members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. They go to people, schools and seminaries all over the world. If the correspondence is any indication, a goodly number of copies go to prisoners in jails all over the United States, many of whom speak highly of the *Standard Bearer*, and all of whom are personally answered. But the *Standard Bearer* does not intend to be a simple presentation of the gospel to unconverted people, much less unconverted people who are well nigh illiterate.

Apparently there is misunderstanding even in the Protestant Reformed Churches about the nature and purpose of the *Standard Bearer* as regards its not being a missionary magazine. Some time ago we asked all the evangelism societies in the Protestant Reformed Churches to help us distribute copies of the magazine by placing them regularly in Christian bookstores in their vicinity. From one of these evangelism societies I received a response that said this: “As an evangelism committee we are interested in reaching the lost. Most articles written in the *Standard Bearer* are for those who already have a sound Reformed, theologically intellectual mentality.

Since we have a zealous heartfelt desire for the salvation of our neighbors, we humbly ask that writers of the *Standard Bearer* consider a writing style that is understandable and attractive to those whom the Lord has not yet revealed Himself to as their personal Savior.” Zeal for the salvation of the lost is commendable. But it is not commendable that this evangelism society does not understand that the *Standard Bearer* is not and has never been a missionary magazine. Besides, such is the witness of the *Standard Bearer* for the Protestant Reformed truth that, as it seems to me, the magazine has a moral claim on every evangelism society in the denomination to help the *Standard Bearer* in its witness.

There has always been criticism of the theological personality of the *Standard Bearer*. People have complained that the *Standard Bearer* is too heavy, too deep, too doctrinal.

The editor of the *Standard Bearer* may not yield to the pressure to change the theological nature of the magazine. He himself must be a theologian; his own writings must be theological. He must see to it that the magazine remains a theological magazine. With the other writers, he must keep a high theological standard. He may not “dumb down” the content of the magazine.

... to be concluded. 

Day of Shadows

George M. Ophoff

The Types of Scripture

The Garden of Eden (3)

George Ophoff was Professor of Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary in its early days. Reprinted here, in edited form, are articles that Ophoff wrote at that time for the Standard Bearer.

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2005, p. 201.

From the very outset, man’s faith in and his love for God were put to a test. For in the garden there was that other tree — the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From the sacred record (Gen. 2 and 3), one may gather the

following data relative to this tree: 1) The tree was called the tree of knowledge of good and evil. 2) Like the tree of life, it was situated in the midst of the garden. 3) The Lord God forbade man to eat of its fruit, with penalty of death.

4) Man nevertheless eats. 5) Man's eyes open, he discovers that he is naked. He became as God, knowing good and evil. 6) The eating of the forbidden tree was a great sin, as is evident from the following: a) The serpent was cursed above all the beasts of the field. b) The ground was cursed. c) The woman's sorrows were greatly multiplied and her conception. d) Man would henceforth eat his bread in the sweat of his brow. e) He was expelled from the garden of Eden and prohibited from eating of the tree of life.

Let us now consider the character, function, and purpose of this tree and attempt to account for its name.

Objective standards of good and evil in the garden

We should note the following. Man is forbidden to eat of this tree. Hence, to eat of this fruit is evil, in that God's command is then being set aside. To refrain from eating of this tree is good, since in this case the divine injunction is being observed. This tree, then, demonstrates to man what is good and what is evil. More precisely, it was a positive and objective exhibition of knowledge of evil (to eat of the tree) and a negative and objective exhibition of knowledge of good (to refrain from eating). In other words, the appearance of the tree meant that man was now in possession of an objective standard of good and evil, and for the reason that to this tree was attached the divine injunction not to eat of its fruit. In this sense did the tree teach man what is good and what is evil, for which reason it was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It must not be supposed, however, that this tree was the only objective standard of good and evil that man possessed. There were other such standards. Man was commanded by God to be fruitful and to multiply and to replenish the earth and to subdue it, and to

have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen. 1:28). God also enjoined man to keep and to dress the garden (Gen. 2:15). And, finally, man was commanded to eat of every tree of the garden, including the tree of life (Gen. 2:16).

It appears, does it not, that the mandate to refrain from eating of the forbidden tree was but one of several commands. Each command served man as an objective standard of good and evil. Hence, even if man had not been forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he nevertheless would have been in the possession of a standard of good and evil. The command to eat of all the trees of the garden, and in particular of the tree of life, was there. Hence, to eat of this tree was an act of obedience. Not to eat must be regarded as disobedience, for it meant going contrary to the express command of God. Hence, also the tree of life (to confine ourselves to this tree) was an objective exhibition of the knowledge of good and evil.

Yet there is a difference between these two trees, as signs of knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life was a positive exhibition of knowledge of good (to eat of the tree) and a negative exhibition of knowledge of evil (to refrain from eating). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, on the other hand, was a positive exhibition of the knowledge of evil (to eat of this tree is sin) and a negative exhibition of knowledge of good (not to eat of the tree is good).

The work of the law in the heart of man

We must go a step further and insist that, even though Adam had received none of the commandments referred to above, he would still have known good and evil. It must be borne in mind that man was *created* a rational moral being, equipped with an apprehension, notion, or sense of God and of good

and evil. Consequently, as soon as man is made to face God's handiwork, he says in his heart, "There is a God, and this God I must serve, praise, and obey, and also God's creatures (including my fellow man) must I love." Man knows, then, that it is good to praise God and that to ignore Him is evil. Such are the plain teachings of the apostle Paul.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God... (Rom. 1:20, 21).

And the preceding verse reads:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest *in them*; for God hath shewed it unto them" (Rom. 1:19).

The apostle asserts that man knows God even though he is without a special revelation. The invisible things of God are clearly perceived from the things made. And man understands these things, for they are made manifest *in man*. Man knows that this God, whose glory and power the things made reveal, must be served. Yet wicked man serves Him not. Because of this knowledge, however, man is held responsible for his apostasy, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness.

Further, even though man may not be in the possession of the ten commandments, which were given to Israel from the summit of the mountain, he nevertheless knows that he has a duty toward his neighbor.

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts,

their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another... (Rom. 2:14, 15).

This passage must not be interpreted to mean that the law of God is engraved upon the tables of the heart of the natural man (per Abraham Kuyper, and the proponents of the theory of common grace). For it is emphatically asserted that the Gentiles do not have the law. However, they do shew the *work of the law* written in their hearts. Now it is exactly the business of the law to accuse or condemn the guilty and to excuse the innocent. The Gentiles are engaged in this work. They accuse or else excuse one another, thereby giving evidence that the *work of the law* (not the law) is written in their hearts. For this work of accusing or excusing one another is at once the work of the law, and must be regarded as an exhibition of the morality and the rationality of the Gentile. It indicates that sin did not succeed in destroying in man his moral sense or apprehension for God and for good and evil. Thus the Gentiles, compelled to do without the light of special revelation, do nevertheless apprehend God, good, and evil. They know good and evil in that they are aware that to serve God is good and that to ignore Him is evil.

However, as to what constitutes good and evil and a worship acceptable in God's sight, they are very much in the dark. This darkness is in turn a result of their apostasy. Natural man refuses to serve God as he ought, according to God's own standards. Depraved man sets up his own standards of good and evil, and according to these self-made standards he shapes his conduct. With that conduct of his he appears before God and he expects to see God kneel down before him and say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." But God says, "Away with

thee, thou worker of iniquity, I know thee not."

But the point that we are making is that the invisible things of God, clearly seen and being understood by the things that are made (general revelation), are sufficient to awaken in man his moral sense and his apprehension of God. Adam, to be sure, was no exception. This means that, aside from the commandments referred to above (special revelation), Adam knew God. He knew he should serve and cleave to God. Hence, Adam knew good and evil. To deny this is equal to denying the moral responsibility of such as are not enlightened by special revelation.

Adam and special revelation

Adam in the state of righteousness had more than a general revelation. He was also given a special revelation. Aside from the light of special revelation, which was made to shine in Adam's heart, there is still a vast difference between this first man and the Gentile walking in darkness. Adam not only knew God, he also loved Him and desired to serve Him. But the Gentile walking in darkness, though he knows God, yet hates God and refuses to serve Him.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man (Rom. 1:21-23).

Adam, however, besides being enveloped by the light of a general revelation, was also privileged to bask in the genial warmth of the light of a special revelation. As was already pointed out, Adam was in possession of the spoken word of God, which came to him in the form of commandments.

There were several such commandments, as we have seen. He was commanded to eat of the trees of the garden but forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam was further commanded to keep and to dress the garden and to have dominion over the inhabitants of the earth. These words, spoken by the Lord God, lie within the province of *special revelation*. And man, in the state of righteousness, was in need of these words. They provided him with ways and means for giving expression to his love and devotion for God in a very specific and concrete form. These words served to give to man's service form and shape and also content. They served him as so many channels of self-expression. They have to do with the *how* and the *what* of man's service and devotion and at once provide him with so many standards for good and evil. The presence of these words mean that God not only revealed unto man *that* he must serve Him (God), but also *how* he shall serve. Adam was commanded to keep to a certain path. These words, then, supplied what general revelation failed to furnish.

Unique character of the one tree as a standard of good and evil

With respect to this special revelation, the question arises, why it was that God singled out this one particular tree and called it the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This question is in order, since also the tree of life and, in a certain sense, every tree made to grow in the garden must be regarded as objective exhibitions of the knowledge of good and evil. Why, then, did the Lord God attach this name to the one tree only? It is not at all difficult to discover the reason. The knowledge it demonstrated was unique as to its *character*. It was knowledge that man may not verify by means of his senses, in particular by means of his sense of taste. Man was simply commanded to take God's word for it

that the eating of the fruit of this tree was evil and would result in death. In other words, Adam must believe God. He must refrain from experimenting with this tree for the purpose of verifying God's statements. He was asked simply to be-

lieve that the testimony of God was true. This testimony must be sufficient to convince him that if he eats from the fruit of this tree he will come to grief. The knowledge, therefore, of which this tree was a symbol is not secured by means of

an experimentation. To the contrary, it is the testimony of God that is given a place in man's heart and transformed there into a conviction. It is a kind of knowledge to which is applied the term *faith*.



Haggai: Rebuilding the Church (14)

The Fourth Prophecy: Haggai 2:20-23

2:20. And again the word of the Lord came unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying,

This fourth and last prophecy of Haggai comes on the same day as the previous Word of God, and nearly four months after Haggai began his work. It is addressed to and is about Zerubbabel, the local civil ruler of the returned captives, and it is a word of promise that concerns especially the coming of Christ as the King of God's people and the great temple builder.

That this prophecy comes on the same day as the last has to do with the fact that it also is a promise of blessing. By this final promise God shows how He will preserve and increase the blessings promised in the previous prophecy and looks ahead to even greater blessings that would come through Christ as King.

Motyer very beautifully gives an overall view of this final prophecy. He says:

The final verses of his book reveal Haggai as the literary equivalent of an impressionist painter — he gives general tone and effect without elaborate detail. His colors are the thunderstorm and the earthquake (2:21), revolution (2:22a), clashing armies (2:22b-c), and civil conflict (2:22d). As in a carefully composed picture, where every stroke is designed to lead the eye to what is central, so here too the focus is like a shaft of sunlight illuminating one item — a ring shining on a finger (2:23).*

2:21. Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth;

There is some question about Zerubbabel's father. He is usually identified as Shealtiel, but there is one passage in the genealogy of I Chronicles in which Zerubbabel is said to be the son of Pedaiah (I Chron. 3:17-19). There are different possibilities suggested with regard to this difficulty. Perhaps the most likely is that Pedaiah was Zerubbabel's actual father, but that after he died, his widow married Salathiel, or that Zerubbabel went to live with Salathiel, who would have been his uncle. That God continually identifies him as the son of Shealtiel is a reminder of his descent from David.

That is the important thing. Zerubbabel was of the royal line of David, through Jeconiah (I Chron.

3:16), more familiarly known in Scripture as Jehoiachin (Matt. 1:11, 12). This king, himself a wicked man, was the grandson of king Josiah of Judah. He ruled for only three months before he was taken away to Babylon and imprisoned there. It was through him, though, that the royal line of David was continued. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, a brother of Jehoiachin, was blinded and his sons were all killed when Jerusalem was taken and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Of Zedekiah we hear no more in Scripture, but Jehoiachin was released from prison by the Babylonian king, Evil-merodach, and given a position of authority in Babylon (Jer. 52:31-34). It was then and there that he must have married and had children, thus preserving the royal seed of David as God had promised. Zerubbabel was his grandson, born in Babylon.

Zerubbabel, as a descendant of David and heir to the throne of David, is addressed here. There is a recognition of his royal prerogative in his identification as governor of Judah, and the promise that God makes to him is really a promise to restore the throne and power of the line of David. In doing this, God says, He will overthrow all earthly thrones, particularly those that had taken captive and oppressed David's descendants.

* Motyer, *Haggai*, vol. III, p. 1000.

Indeed, Zerubbabel functions in this prophecy as a type of Christ. In his office and as seed of David he foreshadows the great Ruler of God's people, the Seed of David *par excellence*. Christ is the Servant of Jehovah, who is addressed here through Zerubbabel, and it is Christ more than Zerubbabel who will be made like a signet on the hand of God. It is He who is chosen by Jehovah of hosts to defeat those who have made war against God's people and whose throne will be over all.

God's first word to Zerubbabel connects this prophecy with the second, for once again God speaks of the great earthquake that will destroy this present world, the earthquake that would accompany the coming of the Desire of all nations. That earthquake would begin at the first coming of Christ and the shaking that accompanied it, and would culminate in the complete destruction of all things.

That shaking, as we have seen, has as its purpose the removal of temporal things, that only those things that are God's work may remain. Here that shaking will be the occasion for raising the throne of David from the low condition into which it had fallen and for making it glorious above all other thrones and kingdoms.

It is that shaking, as interpreted in Hebrews 12:25-29, that makes it clear that this prophecy is about Zerubbabel only as a type of Christ, for in the lifetime of Zerubbabel the throne of David was never restored to its former glory. He was only governor, and is so identified in the prophecy. Though that was a fairly high position in the Persian empire, he was nevertheless under the rule of the Persian kings, and his position was of little account in comparison to that of David, his illustrious ancestor.

Before Christ came, the throne of David would lose even the little glory that it had in the days of Zerubbabel and be reduced to nothing. By the time Jesus was

born, the line of David had been reduced to one woman (Luke 1:34), and the descendants of David had no authority or power any longer. Some of the Jews, the Herodians (Matt. 22:16; Mark 3:6; 12:13), had given up on the line of David and had become supporters of bloody and cruel Herod and his family as the God-appointed rulers of Israel and the continuation of God's promises to David.

2:22. And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots and them that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother.

Here God shows that the shaking prophesied would be the judgment and destruction of the nations. They and their thrones would, by this shaking, be removed, that only the throne of Christ, which cannot be shaken, might remain. God is speaking here of all earthly kingdoms, as is clear from the description of them as the kingdoms of the heathen. There are no other kinds of kingdoms that belong to this present world. They would all be destroyed.

The reference to horses and chariots is a reminder of the temporal might of these kingdoms. Such indications of earthly power were forbidden to the Jews (Deut. 17:16; Ps. 20:7). Their trust and strength was Jehovah Himself, who here foretells the ruin and fall of all the kingdoms of this present world and all their might.

That began at the first coming of Christ. Even Herod recognized the threat that Christ posed to the kingdoms of this world, as did Pilate. It was fulfilled in principle at the cross, which is the judgment of this world, and it is finished in the destruction of all things and the judgment of the nations that takes place at the end of the world when Christ returns.

God accomplishes this through-

out history by keeping the nations at war with one another. Persia was the ruin of Babylon, Greece of Persia, and Rome of them all. Even the kingdom of Antichrist, which God will use to bring down all other power and authority, shall be destroyed in this way. Those kings and kingdoms that give their power to the Beast will in the end turn against the Beast and the whore and make them desolate and naked (Rev. 17:16-18).

This warfare among the nations, through which the kingdoms and their power come down, every one by the sword of his brother, is not only the means by which God controls and directs these kingdoms and prevents their premature development, but is also the way in which He brings His judgment on the nations, culminating in the great battle that will immediately precede the coming of Christ (Rev. 16:14; 20:8).

That shaking of the nations would be, God tells Zerubbabel, the way in which He would once again exalt the throne and power of David and bring all nations under the sway of David's scepter. Only, of course, God is speaking not of David personally, or of David's descendant Zerubbabel, but of Christ, in whom all the prophecies of David and his throne have their fulfillment:

He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Luke. 1:32, 33).

Christ is the King who rules forever on that throne. His kingdom alone is everlasting. He is Lord of lords and King of kings.

2:23. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.


If the day referred to, the day of the shaking of all things, is indeed the great day of the Lord, the day that begins with Christ's coming in the flesh and ends with His return for judgment, then the reference here is not so much to Zerubbabel as to Christ. Indeed, it must be so, for this is a promise of the restoration of the kingdom and of the royal rule of David's descendants, something that did not happen during the days of Zerubbabel, but happened only when Christ came, born of the seed of David, to rule forever on the throne of David.

The signet of which God speaks is a royal ring, used to seal documents, both to make them tamper-proof and to indicate that they con-

tained the decrees and statutes of the king. It is in that reference to a signet, then, that we find the evidence that God is indeed speaking of the royal line and throne of David. That Zerubbabel is described as a signet is due to the fact that the royal power he represented is really the power of God Himself. He and all David's descendants were nothing more than that — signets on the hand of the King of kings, evidences of the power of Him who had given the throne to David in the first place, the one to whom the throne and all its power belonged.

This promise reverses a previous threat made to Zerubbabel's grandfather, Jehoiachin, also called Jeconiah or Coniah:

As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence (Jer. 22:24).

There we see not only that this signet is on the hand of God, whose power and authority the kings of Judah represented like a signet ring, but we see also God's faithfulness to David. To pluck the ring from His hand would be to take the kingdom away from David, and though He removed from David all the trappings and power of the kingdom, He never abandoned His promise, but fulfilled it, and that in a way unlooked for, in Christ. 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Jan Miersma

Royal Children — Beloved of the King

The last time we considered this subject, we saw that the children entrusted to our care are the royal children of our great and heavenly King, adopted by Him and made His own. We reflected on the privilege and responsibility this implies — that God has chosen us, earthen vessels, to reveal His own care for these royal children, and that in the way of this training He reveals His covenant to us and to them.

Were an earthly king to delegate the rearing of his children to others, he would charge his servants to observe certain expectations and requirements in carrying out their duties. So too God, our King, has furnished us with abso-

lute, all-embracing, and abiding principles in His Word to direct us in the vocation He sets before us. Unlike the earthly servants of the king, who must rely upon their own qualifications and abilities, we have the comfort of knowing that our King not only gives us principles and expectations, but by His grace qualifies us, as His servants, for our weighty calling.

What does the King expect of us? Assuming the earthly king of our analogy to be a faithful and responsible father, his first expectation would be that his stewards teach his children of his love for them, since the essence of the parent-child relationship is love, not love now simply as emotional warmth, but as a living bond between two in the sphere of perfection. God Himself *is* love, and within His triune life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, love is a living bond. That love of God for Himself, between those who are

co-equal, involves no condescension or reverential fear. In the parent-child relationship, however, and in many other expressions of human love ordained to reflect God's love for His people in Christ, there is a condescension, a self-disclosure, and a pity or mercy on the part of the greater or stronger, and a gratitude, which works a reverential fear and a zeal to please and obey, on the part of one who is the object of such love. Further, love seeks the beloved and the greatest good of the beloved. This is how God loves His children. This is the love He would have us reveal to His children.

The baby longs after her mother's arms. The toddler runs to shelter in the strong, protecting arms of father. There they have experienced comfort, safety, and strength. The love of mother or father comes first, can only be first, as the ground upon which this re-

Mrs. Miersma is the wife of Rev. Thomas Miersma, missionary in Spokane, Washington.

lationship rests. The parent, condescending to the child's weakness, willingly pours out his life to sustain the life of one utterly helpless in himself. Knowing what is best for the child, he desires the good of the child. In this simple picture is reflected our Father's love for us. Because God first established the relationship of love with us, seeking us and our good, willing to take us into His own covenant life, pouring out His life for us in the death of Christ on the cross, we, like little children, long after God, to be sheltered in His arms, and seek His strength in our needs.

As servants of the great King then, and as those who have themselves experienced this great love of God, we strive obediently to communicate to His children their Father's love, strength, and power so that they may learn to love, fear, and obey Him. In this way we truly love our children, for this is for them their greatest good. First by the language of physical affection and tenderness, the look of love, the gentle voice, in providing nourishment and physical comfort and cleanliness, we show to the helpless little one not only our own love, but Father's love. These are indispensable. Without these our words will mean nothing, or worse than nothing. As we feed, bathe, and diaper our little ones, as we cuddle them in our arms, as we wipe away their tears, we remember that we are not merely doing what comes naturally. We are laying in the hearts of the royal children, the foundations of knowing and loving their heavenly Father.

Herein lies the horror and evil of child abuse and neglect. Just as God established the institution of marriage to picture the covenant bond between Christ and the church, and those who walk in marriage have the calling to shew forth in the marriage relationship that union of Christ and the church, so God instituted the parent-child relationship to display in a creaturely way His covenant bond with

us. When parents neglect or abuse their children, whether physically or emotionally, they mar and destroy that picture. We sin, not only against our children, not only against the institution of the parent-child relationship, but we, as it were, cast black filth upon God Himself. We read or hear with revulsion cases of child abuse reported in the press, but do we look at ourselves, who having known the unfathomable covenant love of our God are far more accountable? Do we look at the many times we become so unjustly impatient and angry with our children, thinking only of ourselves, of our own convenience, of our pride? Do we consider how often we fail to show His covenant love to our children? We confess it is so, to our shame.

The physical comfort and care of our children is, however, just the beginning of their training. Royal children, even before they might seem to be able to understand, would also be told of their fathering, of his goodness and strength, and of his great love for them as his children. So too, with our children, it is never too early to begin to speak to them

So too, with our children, it is never too early to begin to speak to them of their God and Father.

of their God and Father. There is a much greater risk in underestimating our children's understanding, than in overestimating, when it comes to the beginning of their instruction. Thus, as we tenderly calm the little one, we sing to him or her the words of our Father, the precious psalms He has given to us as His revelation of Himself. We sing, "The tender love a father has for all his children dear, such love the Lord bestows on them who worship Him in fear," or, "How good it is to thank the Lord, and praise to Thee, Most High, accord, To show Thy love with morning light, and tell Thy faithfulness each night...." As we lay the baby down to sleep, we pray aloud for him and for ourselves, that we might be

faithful in our calling, he to obey, we to instruct, that our sins and failures may be forgiven, and for grace to trust our Father's faithful promises. Thus, there grows in the consciousness of our child, not only a sense of the loving care of father and mother, but also the presence in his life of a greater and heavenly Father.

We convey this love of their Father to our children in every area of their lives, not only in formal religious instruction. Caregivers of the royal children would no doubt point out to their charges as they grew in understanding, "Look what your father, the king, has given you!" or "Here is the beautiful palace your father, the king, has built!" "See from what your father, the king, has delivered you!" "Behold with wonder the kingdom he has prepared for you!" So we will teach our children, as we sit in our house, as we walk by the way, as we lie down, and as we rise up (Deut. 6:7-8). As we see the wonders of God's creation, as

He works in our lives, providing our needs, healing our diseases, bringing us to repentance, we speak of these things to our children, giving

glory and praise to our great King. We speak of the beauty of the church (Ps. 48) bought in Christ's blood and of our gratitude that He has given us a name and a place in that church.

This will bring us to that greatest of all the stories, the story of our Father's love. Those to whose care the royal children are entrusted would tell the story of the king's own natural son, who rode out as a mighty warrior to deliver them from the power of the enemy, giving his own life as a ransom, that they might become his adopted brethren. They would be taught of their own unworthiness of his great love on account of their enemy origin and the rebellious enemy activities to which they are yet

attracted, yet of the absolute assurance of their father's love for them because they were bought by his own beloved son. Thus we tell our children of their and our history in Adam, of our sins and sinful nature, and of our Father's Son, Jesus, and His great love in dying for those united to Him by faith. We will direct our children to Jesus, our elder Brother, as their deliverer, their comforter, and their great pattern and example.

Royal children would be taught to be thankful for their father's love in the way of loving obedience and reverential fear. For our children this will begin, of course, simply with the knowledge that obedience is pleasing and disobedience displeasing to mother or father, but we will not let it remain there. As our children grow in understanding, we begin to tell them why their obedience rejoices our hearts—it is pleasing to our Father in heaven, and of why their disobedience makes us so sad — it is displeasing to their Father in heaven. It is not first of all that *we* are offended, or inconvenienced, or angry, but that disobedience displeases our Father-King, who so loved us that He gave His own Son. Do not underestimate what our children, by grace, will be capable of understanding. Let this be the great incentive in all their training. For it is the love of God that will work in their hearts both the love for and the godly, reverential fear of their Father, which desires to please Him and dreads to displease Him.

Ironically, it is when we must deal with the disobedience of the royal children, with their struggles against sin, with strife among the royal children, that, as the King's servants, we have some of the greatest opportunities to speak to them of their Father's love. This will require diligence and prayer. Disobedience will be dealt with, as much as possible, privately, individually, and spiritually. Not satisfied by simply sending the prince or princess to his or her chambers

for a cooling off, nor with simply a slap or a swat, we will strive for godly discipline, applying the rod when necessary, but also administering reproof directed to the child's heart. We do not deal only with the act, but we speak to our children about the source of their disobedience in a sinful heart. The goal of love, seeking the beloved's good, is to bring the beloved to see that he or she has sinned against Father's love, to seek to lead the child to repentance. And we will, by God's grace and according to His sovereign appointment, see that repentance, often after many prayers and tears. And then, what greater privilege do we as parents have, than to assure our child that, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9), and to point them to Jesus, the Savior, and the Father's love in Him, and then also to exemplify the Father's love by our own forgiveness of the offense and restoration to fellowship?

An earthly father-king would also have his servants teach his children that in his love he orders all things in their lives for their greatest good. Royal children, though they cannot always understand why those who care for them will cause them sorrow and pain by denying them what is not for their physical welfare, applying ice to a bruise or antiseptic to a raw wound, or chastening with the rod for disobedience, will learn, as they grow, that father and mother seek the greatest good for their children. We teach our children their Father-King's love by being His faithful servants, seeking above all the spiritual good of the King's children, teaching them that that love is so great that we will be willing to cause them sorrow and even pain for the goal of their spiritual well-being. Thus they will be schooled for the greater trials and sorrows that God in His wisdom will send to them, knowing that

their heavenly Father works all things in their lives according to the purpose of His great love for us and our children. If our children are never disciplined or chastened by us, if we never cross their little wills in a foolish attempt to avoid that which will cause them sorrow or pain, how will they understand

...the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth (Heb. 12:5-6).

Finally, the love of our Father-King is perfect and almighty. Here the earthly analogy falls short. No earthly father-king is almighty, eternal, infinite goodness, truth, holiness, wisdom, and love in himself. Our Father-King is. Thus, when we speak of the love of God, we must always speak of His righteous love, His holy love, His love in truth, His all-wise love, His almighty love, His eternal love. His attributes, perfectly one in Him, are difficult for us to comprehend, much less convey and reflect to our small children. In fact, we would shrink from this calling, did we not have many precious promises of our Great King, given us in His Word,

What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant (Ps. 25:12-14).

There is so much more that could be said about teaching the royal children of their Father's love. This article but scratches the surface. Let us pray for grace that we may faithfully teach and show God's great love unto our children.



■ Church Ministers Join Union

Such was a front-page headline of the London, Ontario *Free Press* on November 6, 2004. The article, by Reporter Patrick Maloney, went on to explain:

Nearly 25 years after Rev. Del Stewart answered the Lord's call, one of Canada's biggest unions has answered his. In a North American first, several local United Church ministers — including Stewart of Leamington — have taken a step toward unionizing the clergy, convincing the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) to represent the reverends who claim abuse, insecurity and low wages are rampant in the church.

"Our main concern is abuse of clergy in congregational settings," said Stewart, who was unable to attend the Toronto meeting with CAW president Buzz Hargrove yesterday because of illness. "We certainly don't feel we were called by God to be martyrs...."

The CAW, which generally represent automotive workers, airline workers and some miners, agreed yesterday to represent the ministers after about a month of discussions.

Leading the charge was Rev. Jim Evans of Grace United Church in St. Thomas and his wife, Karen Paton-Evans, who met with Hargrove yesterday, along with Hamilton Rev. David Galston. Ministers need support, Paton-Evans said, in conflicts with churchgoers.

"Our clergy need representation by people who are trained in employment rights and can ensure they are protected and upheld," she said.

Hargrove, who called it "a shock" to be approached by the clergy last month, said a strike is

unlikely and collective bargaining can solve the ministers' problems.

Although his three years in Leamington have been stress-free, Stewart admitted yesterday he has encountered much trouble throughout his career.

"Life was made extraordinarily difficult by a small minority of people... in at least one other church," he said, adding the United Church of Canada's 30 provisions to protect clergy "just aren't working."

"In unity, there is strength. (Unionizing) would allow us to have some strength together to put an end to this sort of thing."

Money is also a concern, Stewart added.

With an annual salary cap reportedly at \$38,000, ministers hope to secure a higher wage as reward for the years of training it takes to become a minister.

"None of us became ministers expecting to grow rich, but none of us took a vow of poverty," he said.

Nearly 20 per cent of United Church clergy in Ontario are on stress leave, CAW Representative, Jim Pare said yesterday, noting his union is proud to be part of the groundbreaking agreement.

As an example of the clergy's problems, Pare noted in some congregations up to 20 people have keys to the minister's home — in some cases, it's people they don't even know.

"It's a group of people who have many similar issues to other workers: health and safety, having a voice and how discipline is dealt with. We think they have the right to join the union."

About 60 Ontario and West Coast clergy are involved in this original effort, and Paton-Evans said the next step is getting the other 4,000 ministers in Canada's biggest Protestant denomination to sign union cards. Some ministers have already signed.

that such should be done, whether there are legitimate grievances or not! What awful blindness when ministers see not the vile corruption of unionism and would desire to place themselves under its dominion! What shame it brings upon the church, as those observing mock. Columnist Bill Brady responds in *The London Free Press* on December 2, 2004:

Ever since that un-religious bombshell was dropped by a few disgruntled United Church ministers, I keep seeing in my mind, this surreal image: Wearing robes, academic hoods and clerical collars, we see a coterie of clergy, but they're not carrying the new hymnal, Voices United, or copies of the Revised Standard Version, they're carrying signs.

They read "Thou shall not scab," "Oh ye of bad faith bargaining" and "Give us this day our daily bread plus 25% over three years with enhanced benefits."

A fantasy surely, yet it looms as a remote possibility now that an almost unthinkable notion has surfaced. It all began a few weeks ago, when a number of stressed-out United Church of Canada ministers decided to put their faith in the Canadian Auto Workers as they make a bid to unionize their church's clergy.

At first maybe CAW president Buzz Hargrove was amused at the prospect of gathering unto himself a pack of parsons, but he must have quickly decided only good could come from this, for him at least. He who would gleefully organize street urchins had they the ability to cough up the dues, has found an intriguing new opportunity, what the CAW says could be a first for North America....

Most ministers, I think, try to honour the scriptural tradition about tithing 10 per cent of their income, and to the devout it's not negotiable.

Given the meager salaries some

How sad, no, how shameful,

Rev. DeVries is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.

preachers are paid by their congregations, what they don't need is the added expense of union dues....

I hope in their first contract they don't insist on this — no Sunday work.

I have for some time been dismayed that many churches, also Reformed churches, are adopting a more business/corporate style in their dealings with ministers, rather than a spiritual/biblical approach. That has been evident in the whole area of obtaining a minister — advertising, surveys requested, résumés submitted, and the like. But this has got to be the ultimate step in the direction of the “business model” — a union-organizing drive by ministers, gaining representation by the Canadian Auto Workers Union!

How thankful we must be for the Church Order of Dordt, which we hold precious, and for the spiritual attitudes and procedures followed in our PRC. How thankful we must be for the high regard we have for the office of the ministry of the Word. May our councils, as well as our congregations, ever be mindful to supply the needs, both material and spiritual, of the pastor. “And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15).

■ Green Light For Same-sex Marriage

In a long-awaited, not unexpected decision, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously ruled on December 9, 2004 that the government has the right to legalize same-sex marriage. Sue Bailey reports in the December 10, 2004 London, Ontario *Free Press*:

The Liberals will move swiftly to legalize gay weddings across the country now that the top court has endorsed a draft bill that

would revolutionize marriage.

Canada would join the vanguard of nations supporting same-sex unions if legislation to be introduced early in 2005 is passed.

Only Belgium and the Netherlands have allowed gays to wed. Voters in 11 U.S. states recently vetoed the idea, making Massachusetts the only American jurisdiction to permit it.

The Supreme Court of Canada said yesterday that Ottawa has sole authority to redefine marriage to include same-sex couples, but that religious officials can't be forced to perform weddings against their beliefs.

Prime Minister Paul Martin called that a green light to press on with a bill that has sowed bitter division among his MPs and voters in general....

Polls suggest just over half of Canadians support gay marriage.

Major news networks in the United States and Britain played the story, an indication of how divisive the issue is in other countries as well.

The high court stressed in its landmark advisory opinion that religious officials cannot be forced to perform unions against their beliefs.

But it refused to say whether the traditional definition of marriage — between one man and one woman — violates equality rights.

It pointedly noted that the federal government has already accepted lower court judgments that exclusion of gays is discriminatory.

It would be “inappropriate” for the court to answer that question after Ottawa waived its right to appeal those rulings, said the high court.

Moreover, more than 3,000 gay couples have wed in six provinces and the Yukon.

“The parties to previous litigation have relied upon the finality of their judgments and have acquired rights which ... are entitled to protection,” said the court.

Times have changed, it suggests. “Several centuries ago, it would have been understood that marriage should be available only to opposite-sex couples.

“The recognition of same-sex

marriage in several Canadian jurisdictions as well as two European countries belies the assertion that the same is true today....”

The court's landmark opinion signals the final stage of a long, bitter fight over whether gays and lesbians should be allowed to marry. ...

The high court's opinion is not legally binding, but its political aftershocks will reverberate across Canada....”

“Times have changed,” suggests the Supreme Court of Canada. The high Court of Canada obviously sees marriage as a purely human institution, undoubtedly conceived of by a few mentally challenged cavemen around a flickering fire. As Prof. David Engelsma rightly asserts in his book, *Marriage — The Mystery of Christ and the Church*, “Naturally, if marriage is a man-made institution, man may also do with that institution what he pleases. He may twist it and turn it to please himself and to suit his every whim and fancy. He may have mistresses. He may divorce for any reason and remarry.... If marriage is man's institution, man may overturn the institution. He may abolish it altogether if he pleases.” The Professor might well add, “He may, as a man, marry a man; or she, as a woman, marry a woman.”

As far as the motivation for this change in the traditional definition of marriage is concerned, it appears increasingly that the goal is not so much marriage itself, but an increased social approval of homosexuality. Since the Supreme Court of Canada decision the media has bombarded the reading and viewing public with nauseating displays of homosexual affection, marriage proposals, etc.

But, yes, this will only serve to undermine the institution of marriage. Looking abroad, such is the case in Scandinavia, where same-sex marriage or its equivalent has been legal for several years.


Stanley Kurtz, writing for *The Weekly Standard*, asserts, "...it (same-sex marriage) has further undermined the institution.... Scandinavian gay marriage has driven home the message that marriage itself is outdated and that virtually any family form, including out-of-wedlock parenthood, is acceptable."

May God give us grace to maintain, and to teach our children,

that marriage is an ordinance of God, a creation ordinance, for all time and for all peoples.

The London Free Press referred to "political aftershocks" of this Court decision — if anything an understatement. The struggle is not finished. We can expect raucous debate in the Canadian Parliament. And Canada has its own religious right, though it pales in

comparison to that in the United States. Without a doubt, in the United States the story is far from finished, even with the reelection of President George W. Bush. There will be many bitter court battles, and the ultimate outcome remains to be seen.

What we do know is that the cup of iniquity is rapidly filling. May our prayer be, "Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly!" 

Report of Classis East

January 12, 2005
Southeast
Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, January 12, 2005. All the churches were represented by two delegates; Rev. David Overway was the chairman for this session.

In attendance also were students from the church history classes at Covenant Christian High School, as well as the delegates *ad examina* from Classis West: Revs. A. Brummel, S. Houck, and D. Kuiper.

Classis had before it two important items. The first was an overture to Synod 2005 asking that synod appoint a study committee to advise the synod whether it should recommend the use of a newer, vernacular Bible translation to our churches. Classis rejected this overture on the following grounds (summarized): 1) The King James Version is still an excellent version both from the viewpoint of *what* had been translated and also *how* it was translated; 2) Any difficulties with the KJV are easy to overcome with a good dic-

tionary and good Bible helps; 3) Introducing another version, at this time, would promote confusion and unrest in the churches. The writers of the overture will now have to decide whether to bring this overture to Synod 2005 for its consideration.

A second matter concerned the deposition of a pastor. This matter was treated in closed session. The consistory bringing the request for deposition was advised by classis, with the concurrence of the delegates *ad examina* from Classis West, to proceed with deposing their pastor.


The report of the church visitors was given. The visitors reported peace and harmony in the churches. The church visitors also served as a committee of classis to investigate the continued viability of Covenant PRC. The committee reported to classis that the condition of the congregation and the increased evangelism efforts led them to the conclusion that Covenant is still viable. They further recommended that Covenant's subsidy be extended for another year. The findings of this committee will be forwarded to Synod 2005.

Voting for synodical delegates resulted in the following: **MINISTERS:** *Primi:* W. Bruinsma, R. Cammenga, C. Haak, K. Koole, R. VanOverloop; *Secundi:* M. DeVries, M. Dick, R. Kleyn, W. Langerak, J. Slopsema; **ELDERS:** *Primi:* G. Boverhof, C. Kalsbeek, D. Kregel, D. Ondersma, T. Pipe; *Secundi:* T. DeVries, J. Engelsma, K. Feenstra, R. Noorman, H. Pastoor.

In other voting, Rev. J. Laning was elected to a three-year term on the Classical Committee; Rev. K. Koole, Rev. C. Haak, and Rev. R. Kleyn were elected to serve as delegates *ad examina*. J. Huisken was appointed to another three-year term as Stated Clerk, and Rev. R. Kleyn was elected to a three-year term as the Assistant Stated Clerk.

In other business, classical appointments were given to Holland, Hudsonville, and Southwest. Subsidy requests were approved for Covenant, Kalamazoo, and Wingham. The expenses of classis amounted to \$1,992.52.

Classis will meet next at the Trinity PRC on May 11, 2005.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

238/Standard Bearer/February 15, 2005

Young People's Activities

Members from our churches around the Chicago, IL area were invited to come together for

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

a night of singing and fellowship Sunday evening, January 16, at Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, Indiana. The Voices of Victory, a quartet of

men from the Grand Rapids, MI area, presented a concert sponsored by the area Young People's Societies. A collection was taken for the 2005 Young People's Convention.

In addition to weekly Bible discussion, many of the Young People's Societies also find time, after studying God's Word, to discuss some subject of importance to them, something that is important to them and their walk as young people in today's world. One such recent discussion at the Lynden, WA PRC focused on the subject of Christian participation in dangerous sports.

The Young People of the Loveland, CO PRC were asked to meet in their church basement after their weekly catechism classes to help clean the folding chairs in their church basement. Later bulletins from Loveland gave no indication of the outcome of that project. We hope it was positive. Now, if we could only get them to clean their rooms.

School Activities

The School Board of the Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School in Loveland, CO took advantage of Rev. S. Key's visit to the Loveland area on church visitation to arrange to have him speak to their School Society on Thursday, January 20. Rev. Key spoke on the subject, "The Biblical Basis and Goal of Christian Education."

The Hope Foundation, from Hope PR Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI, invited friends and supporters of Hope to see "Al-Can Highway: Adventure Road to Alaska" on Saturday, January 15 at Grandville Middle School. This was the first travelogue in the 2005 Travel and Adventure Series.

Mission Activities

In a follow-up to the "News" in our last issue, we include more information concerning Rev. J. Mahtani's visit to the PR Fellowship of Fayetteville, NC. Rev.

Mahtani writes in part that the Fellowship is very encouraged by the recent regular attendance of a new couple. During the Mahtanis' visit, the Fellowship also had three gentlemen drive from over two hours away to join with them at the evening worship service. On their way home, the Mahtanis got a call from the new family from Morgantown, PA that recently visited the work in Allentown, PA. The Mahtanis decided to take a detour, and they ended up visiting with them for several hours. Rev. Mahtani ends by saying, "The Lord was pleased to give us work to do in eastern USA; the saints are isolated and scattered and are looking for help. May God give us the wisdom and the courage to bring the faithful preaching of the gospel wheresoever He is pleased to give us open doors to do so."

Our denomination's missionary to the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship of Spokane, WA, Rev. T. Miersma, recently made copies of a one-year plan to read through the Bible available. The suggestion was made that those who would be interested in pursuing such a plan might begin together at a given date, and so be reading through the same part of Scripture at the same time, which would afford opportunities for spiritual discussion and growth. It was decided that a good time to start would be March 1, as the months would then be, for the most part, the same in length as if they had started on January 1.

Our denomination's missionary to Northern Ireland and the Covenant PR Fellowship in Ballymena, Rev. A. Stewart, had opportunity recently to debate the question, "Is Exclusive Psalmody Taught in Scripture?" Rev. Stewart took the position that it was, while Rev. Ivan Foster, pastor of Kils Kerry Free Presbyterian Church, took the position that it was not. The debate took place at the Ballymena Leisure Centre.

Evangelism Activities

Christianity on Campus, part of the evangelism efforts of Grace PRC in Standale, MI and organized and run by PR students at Grand Valley State University, began a 12-week series of studies for their spring semester in mid-January. Rev. M. Dick, pastor at Grace, and Rev. C. Haak, pastor at Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, plan to alternate leading discussions on various aspects of the truth and life of Christians in today's world. Rev. Haak introduced the series with the first subject, "Discovering God." Let us pray that God will work by His mighty power for a clear witness to His truth at GVSU.

Congregation Activities

In news from Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, N.J. we recently read that the congregation there made a unanimous decision late last year to sell their property. This decision was very difficult to make. The congregation built the church and has maintained it for some sixteen years, but they are convinced that the decision to sell is in obedience to the Lord. When they formed a committee to implement this decision, they also formed a committee to look into relocation, both of a parsonage and of a place of worship. Their present location is not easy to find and not easily accessible to public transportation — something commonly used in that part of the country. It is Covenant's intent to use the monies from the sale to pay off their indebtedness, to purchase another parsonage, and then find adequate facilities to rent, in a different location, one more easily accessible. Covenant hopes to relocate and then evaluate in a few years what the will of the Lord is for them.

An open house to welcome Rev. R. Cammenga, his wife Ronda, and their children was held at Faith PRC in Jenison, MI on January 14.


Ladies Morning Bible Study at Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI began the new year discussing

two books, "Homeward Bound" and "Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and the Church." The ladies planned to discuss such topics as marriage, children, the Christian husband, the Christian wife, divorce, and much more.

Minister Activities

Provided the Doon, Iowa PRC does not receive a pastor soon, Rev. J. Kortering and his wife have agreed to supply their pulpit from February 14 through May 15.

The Council of the First PRC in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, has

formed a new trio, consisting of the Revs. W. Bruinsma (Kalamazoo, MI), Rev. A. denHartog (minister-on-loan to Singapore), and Rev. J. Mahtani (missionary to the Eastern USA). A special congregational meeting was scheduled for January 23. 

Announcements

TEACHERS NEEDED

Eastside Christian School, Grand Rapids, MI, is seeking applicants for 2005-2006 for a teaching position in a multi-grade classroom (Grades 1-3). Those applying should be members of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. Send applications and a résumé to Agatha Lubbers at
Eastside Christian School
2792 Michigan St. NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49506.
Telephone: (616) 942-2939.

Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School is seeking a full-time elementary teacher for the 2005-2006 school year. Those interested should send a résumé to the school:

1545 Wilson Ave. SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49544.

Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School, Loveland, CO, is seeking applicants for a middle-room teacher (grades 4-6). Those applying should be members of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America. Send applications and a résumé to Mr. Larry Abel at

LPRCS
705 E. 57th St.
Loveland, CO 80538
phone: 970-667-9289
e-mail: lprcs@juno.com.
Or, phone Glen Griess at
970-669-2589.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 14, 2005,

ROBERT (Pete) and MARILYN ADAMS

will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary. On this occasion, we their children express our thanks to them for their love and dedication to training us in the way of the Lord. We give our covenant God the glory for the years He has given them together and their mutual growth in understanding His truth. We ask His continued blessing on their marriage for many years to come, if it be His will.

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

* Cyndi

* Stephanie

* Susan

Grand Rapids, Michigan

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2005-2006 academic year should make application at the March 17, 2005 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 17 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418.

John Buiten, Secretary

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The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.